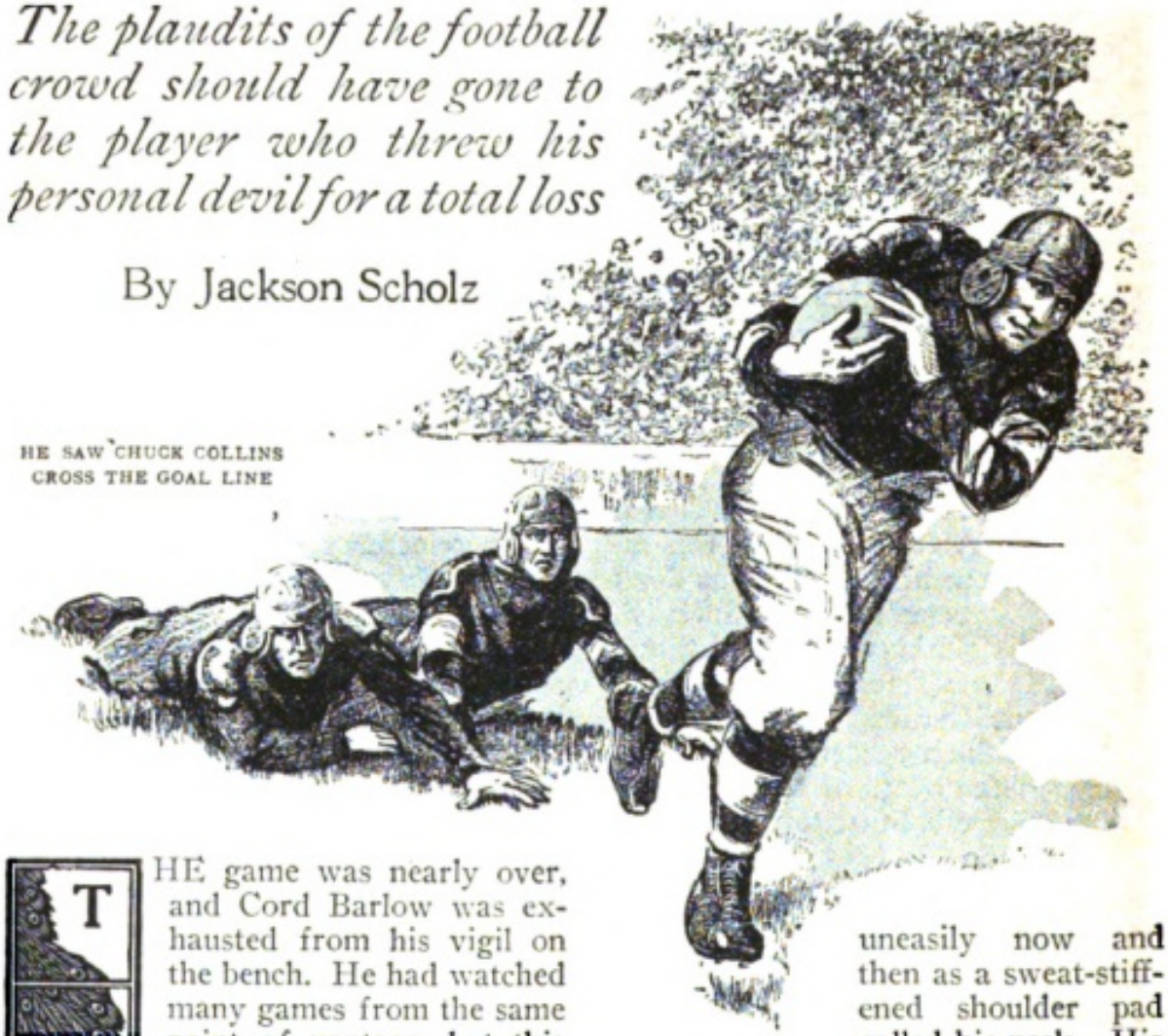
Forty-three Fifty-two

The plaudits of the football crowd should have gone to the player who threw his personal devil for a total loss

By Jackson Scholz



HE SAW CHUCK COLLINS CROSS THE GOAL LINE

THE game was nearly over, and Cord Barlow was exhausted from his vigil on the bench. He had watched many games from the same point of vantage, but this one, he reflected bitterly, would be his last.

They always tired him physically. He wondered dully why this should be so—merely watching them like this.

Barlow sat with a blanket pulled tightly over his shoulders, squirming uneasily now and then as a sweat-stiffened shoulder pad galled his neck. His eyes remained somberly fixed on a single dynamic figure on the field, the same player he had watched often before. It was almost a habit now.

It was a bad habit, too. He realized this, because the thing was slowly "getting" him. He had never before ex-

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

perienced this slow mounting of sullen anger nor the merciless hope that something disastrous would happen to that blond whirlwind on the field.

Was that man impervious to punishment? Could nothing check the savage fury with which he led his mediocre team against this powerful blue machine? Cord Barlow had come to believe that nothing could stop him.

For three years he had watched Chuck Collins perform in just this way. he had watched him at first with awe and admiration, later with wretched envy, and now— He scarcely dared to analyze his thoughts.

For three years Barlow had poured his strength and soul into the daily grind of practice. For three years he had understudied the brilliant Collins, hoping in every fiber of his being for the chance to show that he, Cord Barlow, also was a quarterback of distinction.

In practice Cord's judgment was swift and true, his speed, strength and stamina above the average—but Chuck Collins excelled him in all these things. For three years, therefore, Cord had watched each game from the security of the bench.

This was his last game. It was Chuck's last game, too, but Chuck was captain now. He had experienced every thrill the game could offer, while Cord had never heard his name thundered from the massed thousands in the stands. The student body scarcely knew that he existed.

II

THE score was tied and the few remaining moments were charged with possibilities. Once more the blond captain emerged safely from the pile, and Cord tried, by blinking, to dispel the thin film of rage before his eyes.

The preceding years of struggle and bitter disappointment seemed to surge upon him with a force which almost choked him. His emotions which he long had gallantly curbed, as became a sportsman, exploded violently within, leaving him dizzy and shaken.

He hated football, that body-racking sport, which calmly accepted every sacrifice and offered nothing in return. He hated himself for submitting to the tyranny of the game. He hated the coach who drove him mercilessly day after day. He hated the shrieking crowd in the great stadium. But, most of all, he hated that blond, dynamic figure on the field.

For Chuck Collins had deprived him of his chance, and Cord Barlow detested him with a blind, unreasoning fury. He even prayed fervently for the opportunity to do him harm, to discredit him in the eyes of the stupid maniacs in the stands.

He was recalled from his bitter reverie by a fresh outburst from the crowd. He focused his eyes on the field and noted indifferently that his team had completed a pass to within twenty yards of the other eleven's goal. He pulled his blanket tighter against the chill of the evening, and his shoulders sunk even lower in their dejection.

Suddenly he was startled, and then he thrilled to the very tips of his toes.

"Barlow!" It was the voice of the coach.

The youth leaped to his feet, tripping on the blanket in his eagerness to discard it.

"Y-yes, sir," he stammered.

"Warm up!"

Those magic words! Probably there was some mistake. Perhaps he hadn't heard correctly. He stood for a moment in awful uncertainty, swallowing desperately at the lump in his throat—and then again came the impatient command:

"Warm up, Barlow!"

He sprinted down the side lines, followed by the envious eyes of those left on the bench. It seemed that the swish of his canvas-clad legs was the sweetest music he had ever heard.

He glanced anxiously at the coach, but the eyes of the older man were

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

riveted on the field, and his teeth were clamped grimly on a dead cigar, as his team made another first down. Abruptly he beckoned and Cord was at his side. The coach spoke from the corner of his mouth without shifting either his eyes or the cigar.

"Relieve Milton at left half," he instructed. "After the first play tell Chuck to use forty-three fifty-two on the last down. There'll be three left after this one. Steady a minute. Now go!"

Cord's mind whirled as he sprinted on the field, holding up a hand to attract the referee's attention.

What did it all mean? Maybe the coach was just giving him his chance. He was a wonderful fellow after all.

Forty-three fifty-two—a complicated crisscross. It was a desperate chance, but time was limited. Football—the greatest game of all—the king of sports!

Damn that buckle on his head gear! Why did his fingers fumble so? His chance had come at last! His body was iron, his soul invincible—nothing, now, could stop him.

He reported to the referee and took his place. The signals were called. The lines lunged. It was an off tackle play with no gain.

The opponents' line had held, but it was great to Cord Barlow to feel the impact of these sweating, panting men. Then Chuck Collins came up and stood before him to receive the instructions he knew the coach had sent. His blond head was matted with dirt and grass, his face distorted by a livid bruise upon one cheek. Cord saw that his eyes, though, were calm and steady—damn his coolness!

Barlow delivered his message, and Collins nodded briefly. Once more came the signals, and Cord clenched his hands with anger as the numbers were called for another man to carry the ball. Why couldn't they let him have his chance?

The play was run deliberately wide to place the team in a position to use forty-three fifty-two. The time was desperately short. This play probably would be the last.

And still Chuck Collins took his time. Too much hung wavering in the balance for haste. The play required delicate timing and coördination. It would never do to hurry now. The crowd, too, knew that a dramatic crisis impended, and the vast stadium became hushed, as if smothered by some huge invisible blanket.

The teams formed, and Cord crouched, quivering with suspense. He was no longer an individual, nor did he resent that fact. He gloried, instead, in the unity of that machine of which he was a cog.

III

THE signals crackled in the crisp, still air. The crowd inhaled a mighty breath. The players cursed softly or breathed a fervid prayer. The ball was snapped, and the savage impact could be heard to the farthest corner of the stands.

Cord leaped into motion to perform his part, but was suddenly checked by a wild yell. Something, he knew, had failed. An important cog had slipped.

His mind was singularly clear as he poised for an instant, while the situation recorded itself on his brain with the vividness of a camera lens. He saw the crisscross start, he saw the fumble, and he saw the ball leap from the tangled mass, go clear and bound into the open.

He swerved in the fraction of a second, and sprinted for the ball. He could reach it first, no doubt of that! He would show 'em now! His chance! A touchdown! Ah!

He was almost upon the ball when he saw the opposing end. The man had been playing wide, and now came charging in, snarling like an animal. Cord had a clear impression of the other's bloodshot eyes and massive shoulders. He judged the distance in

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

a glance, and saw that they would arrive together.

And then, from another angle, he glimpsed a swiftly moving blond head, also bearing down upon the ball, but too far away to arrive in time.

Cord was hardly conscious that his mind functioned at all in the brief instant which remained. One thought, however, was terribly clear. His chance was gone; completely gone, and that is why he never knew what hidden reservoir of strength propelled him over those last few yards.

A sob rasped from his throat as he lunged entirely over the precious ball, and crashed with terrific force into the body of the charging rival end.

For an instant things went black, but when he finally struggled to his feet, he saw that Chuck Collins was stretched safely across the goal line with the ball clasped tightly in his arms.

The members of the squad surged joyously about their captain, but he fought clear and hurried to Cord Barlow's side, drawing an arm tightly about his teammate's shoulders.

"Cord, old man," Chuck said huskily, "it was the greatest thing I ever saw. You won it for us!"

Cord Barlow tried to speak above the huskiness in his own throat, but, before the words could form, the crowd closed in and carried Collins off on their shoulders.

Cord watched them go, and wondered why he wasn't resentful. Even as he made his solitary way to the showers that quiet feeling of happiness persisted. He grinned contentedly to himself as he swung along.

A PRETTY GAME

I said he came in handy
To pass the time to-day;
He asked about to-morrow;
I shrugged and turned away;
And now I have before me
A pretty game to play.
I cannot sigh,
I dare not cry,
And I must pity never—
For, oh, I think he is my love,
My very love forever!

Mella Russell McCallum

A SONG OF CHEER

Although I may have pain
I know I never shall be sad again,
For I have heard
Love's word
Which I so longed to hear;
Sweeter than music it fell on my ear.
And I have had
So much to make me glad
That it would be a sacrilege to sorrow
Even if heart break hid within to-morrow.

Elisabeth Scollard

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN